

Statement on the 60th Anniversary of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

November 22, 2023

Sixty years ago today, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, a defining moment of deep trauma and loss that shocked the soul of our Nation. Millions of Americans still remember exactly where we were when it happened. I was in college and had just left class, joining other students glued to the news in silence along with the entire country.

The weeks and months that followed awakened a generation. President Kennedy had been a war hero, Senator, and statesman. He set our Nation's compass firmly on many of the most consequential issues of the 20th century, from civil rights to voting rights to equal pay for women. He led with calm resolve through the most dangerous moments of the cold war. And at the dawn of a new decade, he called us forward to a New Frontier, propelling us to the Moon and beyond. He inspired a nation to see public service as a calling.

Like millions, I deeply felt his conviction and dreams for America. His ideas rhymed with the lessons I'd learned from the nuns at school and around my father's kitchen table: that we are each called to do good works on this Earth, to try to make our world a better place in the service of others. But what stuck with me most was President Kennedy's courage, his heroic sense of duty, and his family's capacity to absorb profound suffering.

We saw that most clearly with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, whose grace and resilience still hold the hearts of the American people, as they did during that most challenging time in the life of her family and of our Nation. His brother Robert was one of my greatest political heroes; and Teddy was one of my closest friends. His daughter Caroline remains a dear friend as well, along with countless Kennedy family members whom Jill and I have been privileged to know, and to whom we send our love and affection on this day of remembrance.

In life and in death, President Kennedy changed the way we saw ourselves, a country full of youthful hopes and ambition, steeled with the seasoned strength of a people who've overcome profound loss by turning pain into unyielding purpose. He called us to take history into our own hands and to never quit striving to build an America that lives up to its highest ideals.

On this day, we remember that he saw a nation of light, not darkness; of honor, not grievance; a place where we are unwilling to postpone the work that he began and that we all must now carry forward. We remember the unfulfilled promise of his Presidency, not only as a tragedy, but as an enduring call to action to each do all we can for our country.

May God continue to bless President John F. Kennedy.

NOTE: The statement referred to U.S. Ambassador to Australia Caroline B. Kennedy.

Categories: Statements by the President : President John F. Kennedy, 60th anniversary of assassination.

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